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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE AND EUR/PPD
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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV HR
SUBJECT: CONCERT BY NATIONALIST POP SINGER PASSES WITHOUT INCIDENT

REF: ZAGREB 404

¶1. (U) The controversial Croatian pop singer Marko Perkovic
Thompson's concert on Zagreb's central square on May 30 passed
without serious incident or any significant presence of the Ustasha
(neo-Nazi) insignia that had appeared among his audiences in earlier
performances. The concert, organized by the War Veteran's
Association of Zagreb and partially financed by the City of Zagreb
(REFTEL), was held to mark War Veterans' Day. Teenagers wearing
black and parents with young children wearing the uniform of
Croatia's national soccer team dominated the audience of some 60,000
persons packed into Jelacic square. A few small groups chanted
abusive slogans against Serbs while waiting for the beginning of the
rain-delayed concert, and several teenagers were photographed giving
Nazi salutes. But most media and an observer from the Embassy's
Political Section present at the square saw no Ustasha insignia or
slogans in the audience, a finding confirmed by the police.

¶2. (U) After an hour's rain delay, Thompson set the tone by
beginning the concert with a more moderate number, "Friends," rather
than his usual opening number, "Cavoglave," whose introduction has
an Ustasha greeting ("za dom spremni" or "prepared for the
homeland") and a chorus including machine gun fire. Thompson
continued by saluting war veterans, particularly former general
Mirko Norac, who was convicted earlier that day by a Zagreb court
for crimes against ethnic Serbs (septel). During the concert
Thompson also thanked Zagreb Mayor Milan Bandic for refusing to
succumb to pressure not to allow the concert to take place and later
hailed the ICTY's indicted general Gotovina. The audience, including
thousands of teenagers too young to have any direct memories of the
1990's Homeland War, seemed to know every word of his lyrics.

¶3. (U) Both before and after the concert, many local human rights
activists condemned the event and criticized Mayor Bandic for
supporting it. Criticism focused not just on the anti-Semitism
implicit in any use of neo-Nazi symbolism, but even more so on the
nationalist tenor of Thompson's music and lyrics that some view as
inciting intolerance toward Serbs. Local media noted the particular
paradox that Mayor Bandic is a leading politician for the opposition
Social Democratic Party, whose political appeal is based to some
degree on being less nationalistic than the ruling HDZ. SDP
leaders, however, have been careful not to publicly criticize
Bandic's decision to sponsor the concert. SDP's President Zoran
Milanovic was quoted as saying only that Croatian "society is
unfortunately still very divided, although some persistently deny
that" and "it will take a lot of patience and good will to overcome
that." PM Sanader, in a comment on June 2, urged Thompson to do
more to personally discourage his fans from using Ustasha symbols,
noting that any nostalgia for that era was misguided.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Supporting Croatia's veterans and "preserving the
dignity of the Homeland War" remain sensitive political issues in
this country. Friday's unintentionally twinned events of the
Ademi-Norac verdict and the Thompson trial provided an interesting
display of how Croatia has both made progress in coming to terms

with the history of the war, but still struggles with expressing
national pride in an inclusive fashion. The fact that Thompson's
audience showed little interest in responding to the Norac
conviction shows that, even among some of Croatia's most alienated
groups, the emotions of the war may be beginning to fade. END
COMMENT.